

PBGG Mentor-Mentee Conflict Protocol

Written/Revised: May 2021

This document outlines how mentees (PBGG graduate students and post-docs) and mentors (faculty PIs) can recognize, address, seek help with, and solve conflicts either internally or with external resources such as the Ombuds office (see [Resources](#)). It addresses minor communication conflicts and provides guidance and resources for formal conflicts such as sexual harassment. *This is currently a draft, seeking PBGG feedback, that was created in collaboration with the entire PBGG Mentorship committee and the Ombuds Office.*

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How to use this Mentor-Mentee Conflict Protocol

Identify the conflict type you are experiencing and refer to the corresponding pathway on the Conflict Resolution Map and section of this document for guidance and next steps.

Mentors and Mentees

Mentors are defined here as faculty members, staff members, and/or Principal Investigators (PIs) who employ, advise, direct, pay, or manage graduate students or post-docs in research or teaching settings. Most of the time this will be the PI of a lab mentoring their grad students and post-docs. Mentors are expected to provide logistical support (lab space, research equipment, paperwork, etc.), scientific guidance, career guidance, and often financial support for their mentees.

Additional mentors may include academic advisors that are assigned to graduate students who enter the PBGG; external PIs that are involved on a mentee's project but are not the primary PI of the mentee; QE or Dissertation committee members which are faculty members assigned to graduate students in their second years; or faculty advisors in charge of courses for which the mentees are teaching assistants.

Mentees are defined here as graduate students or post-docs in research or teaching positions under faculty and/or PI supervision.

The PBGG expects all mentors and mentees to be receptive to the use or request to follow this protocol in order to identify, address, and attempt to resolve any conflict that either party feels is hindering the mentor-mentee relationship or their personal and professional growth and well-being. We strongly encourage this protocol to be employed early in an observed conflict.

Mentor/Mentee Expectations

Positive and fruitful mentoring relationships are the goal and expectation for every mentor-mentee pairing of the Plant Biology Graduate Group. The PBGG expects all faculty to invest time and support into all of their mentees and foster opportunities for frequent, positive, and open communication with each mentee.

Basic mentoring practices include guiding students/mentees through:

- program expectations
- protocols of academic conduct
- degree requirements
- research and teaching
- capstone work (such as thesis or dissertation research)
- professional development

Setting Expectations Worksheet

<https://grad.msu.edu/sites/default/files/content/mentoring/Student-Advisor%20Expectation%20Scales.pdf>

UC Davis Mentoring Guidelines <https://grad.ucdavis.edu/sites/default/files/upload/files/grad-council/mentoring.pdf>

Graduate Student Bill of Rights
<https://grad.ucdavis.edu/sites/default/files/upload/files/current-students/gradstudentrights.pdf>

What is Conflict?

What is conflict?

“Conflict may be defined as a struggle or contest between people with opposing needs, ideas, beliefs, values, or goals. Conflict on teams is inevitable; however, the results of conflict are not predetermined. Conflict might escalate and lead to nonproductive results, or conflict can be beneficially resolved and lead to quality final products.”

Thakore, D, (Mar. -Apr. 2013), Conflict and Conflict Management, Journal of Business and Management, Volume 8, Issue 6, PP 07-16.

A perspective on conflict

- Conflict is normal whenever people get together.
- Conflict is a natural aspect of human interaction. Humans interact at work, so conflict will occur at work.
- Conflict consumes time and energy, involves risk, and unresolved or ignored conflicts can often cause significant damage to individuals, relationships, and the organization.
- Most of the damage results, not from the conflict itself, but from the dysfunctional behaviors people employ to try to manage it.
- Given the above, acting constructively to resolve and manage conflicts at work is an important part of every employee's job.

Conflict Competence

“Conflict competence is the ability to develop and use cognitive, emotional, and behavioral skills that enhance productive outcomes of conflict while reducing the likelihood of escalation or harm. The results of conflict competence include improved quality of relationships, creative solutions, and lasting agreements for addressing challenges and opportunities in the future. As with all competencies, people can learn ways to improve, change, and develop.”

(Source: <http://www.conflictdynamics.org/blog/2013/11/conflict-competence/>)

Signs and Types of Conflict

Signs of conflict are unique to each person and mentor-mentee relationship. Generally speaking, if communication is poor, unproductive, or difficult to arrange, and/or one party is consistently feeling isolated, unhappy, ignored, or taken advantage of by the other, there is some sort of conflict present. It is not uncommon for one party to perceive a conflict and the other to not consider the situation a conflict.

Types of conflict and signs of issues:

- 1. Career development:**
 - Mismatched goals or priorities
 - Insufficient opportunities
- 2. Communication problem:**
 - Avoidance - not responding to emails, not meeting, not communicating
 - Different, unmet, or inconsistent expectations
 - Issues with delivering or receiving feedback
 - Distrust
- 3. Well-being:**
 - Financial issues
 - Stress/anxiety
 - Health-related issues
 - Family or care-taking responsibilities
 - Work/life balance issues
- 4. Work and learning environment:**
 - Bullying or abusive behavior
 - Distrust
 - Clashing work styles
- 5. Sexual harassment or discrimination:**
 - [Discrimination](#)
 - [Hate and Bias](#)
 - [Sexual Harassment](#)
 - Other sex based conduct
 - [Sexual Violence](#)
 - [Other Prohibited Behavior](#)

Conflict Resolution Basics

- Identify the problem together:
 - establish the presence of a conflict
 - be sure both parties understand the conflict in question from other person's perspective
- Both parties keep records of the conversations and meetings involved in the conflict resolution process.
- Conflict analysis questions:
 - What's going on?
 - Which conflict category does it fall under (see [above](#))?
 - Who are the parties involved?
 - Consider the context: what are the policies, professional rules and processes, expectations, stakeholders to be considered in the conflict?
- Separate the people from the issue or conflict: focus on the problem to be solved, judgement free

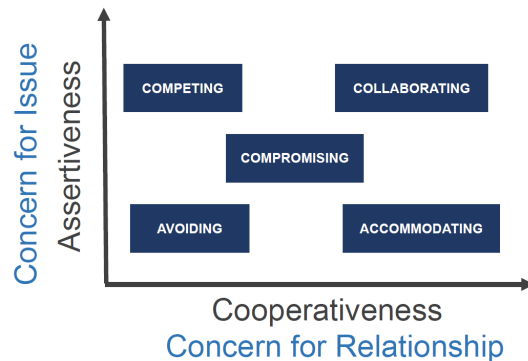
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- Focus on interests of the parties involved
 - Interests include: values, needs, desires, fears
- Identify the presenting and the underlying issues. An underlying conflict may be resulting in the surface issues being addressed.
- Consider conflict styles and which one might be best to use in the given situation; see Thomas-Killman diagram for best option to seek
- Foster an ongoing discussion to review the issues and explore more solutions.

Thomas-Killman Conflict Mode Instrument

All 5 modes have their place in a working environment but usually a specific style may be best in certain circumstances.
Choose a style deliberately.



Communication techniques

- Employ care, sensitivity and respect
- Actively listening to each party involved
- Foster a sense of trust and safety; address your own and others' emotions with care.
- Use collaborative communication approaches and listening tools
- Understand common core needs and be attentive to those needs of the team members
- Be specific, share impact, speak tentatively, and be curious
- Don't assume, judge, or blame

Open Ended Questions

PURPOSE: Understand the other person's view point and find out their concerns/feelings about the situation.

Do not suggest there is a "right" answer; Take a neutral approach; Promote a dialogue; Keep communication moving forward – do not get stuck on one point

Affirmation

PURPOSE: Create a safe environment for the dialogue and reinforce that you are empathetic.

Accept what the other person is saying as the way they view the situation.

Reflective Listening

PURPOSE: Demonstrate you are actively listening and understand what the other person is saying.

Levels: **Repeating**: repeat phrases or use synonyms; **Paraphrasing**: Restate what is inferred or said; **Reflecting concerns/feeling**: Highlight feeling and concerns underlying what was said using responsive statements (e.g., "Oh...", "It seems like...", "It sounds like...")

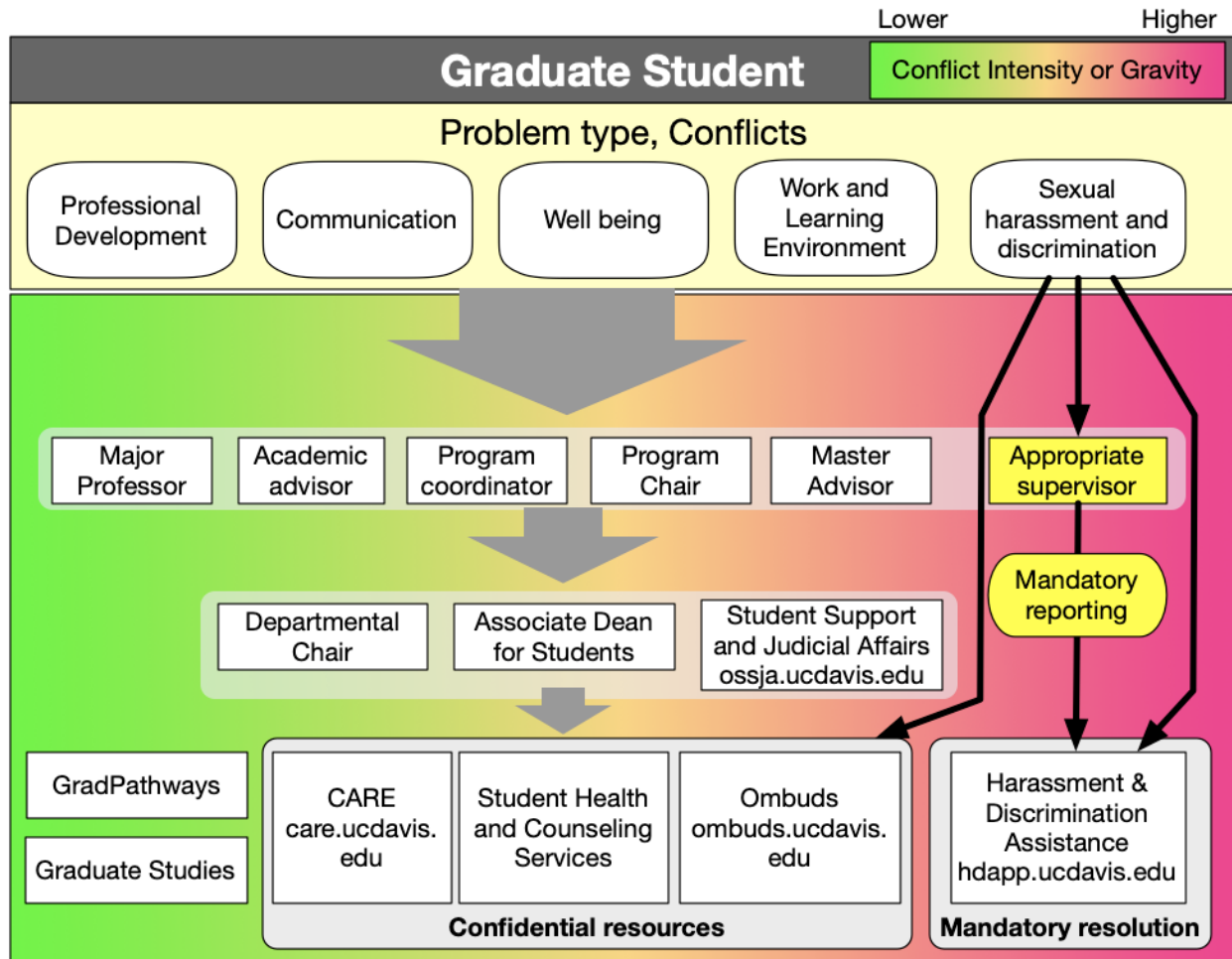
Summaries

PURPOSE: Create a working alliance based on trust and respect.

Clarify and reinforce the focus; be concise; end with an invitation to add to or correct the summary

Conflict Resolution Map

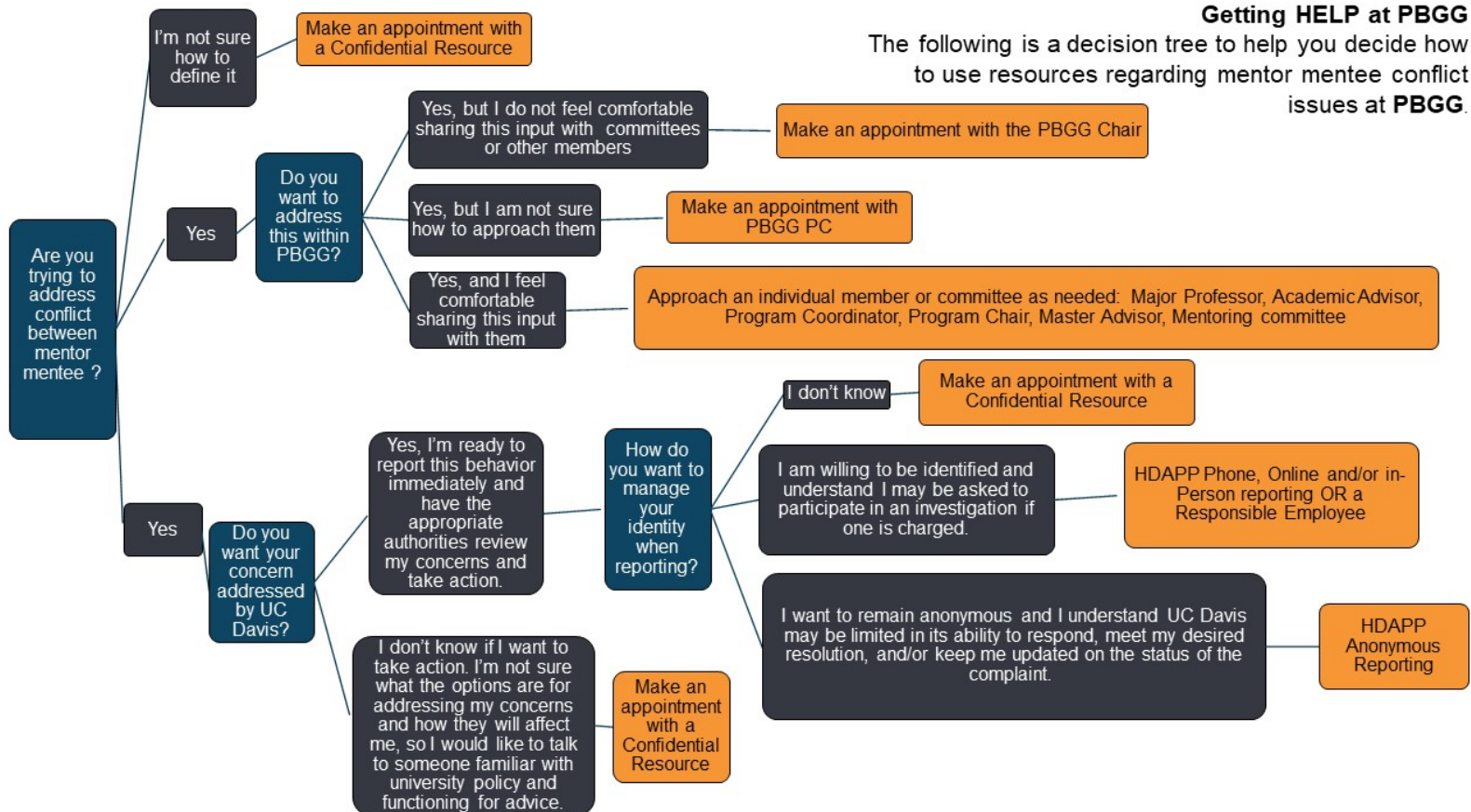
Refer to the [Resources section](#) for descriptions on confidentiality, duties, and responsibilities of the various groups listed here. Some are required to take certain actions, others are not.



Choosing the Right Resolution Path/ Do you want your concern addressed by PBGG vs third parties:

Getting HELP at PBGG

The following is a decision tree to help you decide how to use resources regarding mentor mentee conflict issues at PBGG.



Resolving Career Development Conflicts

Examples of conflict: Student is interested in industry or teaching but the PI cannot or has not provided opportunities for industry or teaching experience; post-docs need grant writing experience but the PI does not let them help write grants.

Resolution Pathway: Mentee should explore workshops and career-development resources offered by organizations such as [GradPathways](#). Asking for a career-focused conversation with their PI, academic advisor, or other faculty with experience in the given area can help mentee share their career goals and look for additional opportunities.

Resolving Communication Conflicts

Examples of conflict: A student has expressed concern multiple times about an experiment or authorship and the PI continually ignores their concern; post-doc feels their requests for research meetings are constantly denied; students feel their ideas are not listened to or taken seriously in meetings.

Resolution Pathway: Mentee should discuss the issue with their mentor or academic advisor. Before doing so they may want to consult the [Ombuds Office](#) for help with communication techniques or practice conversations to broach an uncomfortable subject. If conflict persists, further help can come from the program/department chair, Master Advisor, or Dean's Office. See [Example Conflict Resolution](#) steps 1-3 below and [Conflict Resolution Basics](#) for communication tips.

Resolving Well-Being Conflicts

Example of conflict: Student's stipend is late or skipped; paperwork or clerical errors; need for personal time off for mental/physical health or family/care-taking responsibilities; post-doc is struggling to complete experiments.

Resolution Pathway: Mentee can discuss the conflict with their mentor or the program coordinator. Continuing issues can be taken to the program or department chair if unresolved. See [Example Conflict Resolution](#) for steps and [Conflict Resolution Basics](#) for communication tips. [Student Health and Counseling Services](#) may be contacted for help and resources regarding mental or physical well-being.

Resolving Work and Learning Environment Conflicts

Examples of Conflict: PI loses temper and yells at students; student is expected to work late night hours alone although this makes them feel unsafe; faculty member makes off-color jokes that make post-docs and students feel uncomfortable or belittled; PI refuses to reschedule or adjust mandatory meetings or lab work to accommodate parent-researchers or researchers with disabilities or illnesses.

Resolution Pathway: If the mentee wants someone to intervene or take action, the mentee can contact the program or department chair. If communication with the mentor or program chair has failed the mentee can contact HDAPP, CARE, Grad Studies, or the Ombuds office depending upon the desire for confidentiality, need for action, or severity of the issue. **Refer to the [Resources section for descriptions on confidentiality, duties, and responsibilities of the various groups mentioned here. Some are required to take certain actions, others are not.](#)**

Resolving Sexual Harassment and Discrimination

Examples of Conflict: Faculty member asks about or makes fun of post-doc's sexual identity or orientation or race; lab member follows around, stares at, brushes up against, touches without permission, or intentionally blocks the path of a fellow lab member; PI makes inappropriate or lewd comments or jokes; lab manager posts lewd content or sexual jokes in the lab; lab member repeatedly asks for dates or sexual favors from a staff member.

Resolution Pathway: In minor cases the mentor may be contacted for help if the mentee trusts and feels comfortable. Mentee may go directly to [HDAPP](#) (non-confidential and mandated to take action in certain cases), or [CARE](#) (a confidential sexual harassment and sexual violence group not required to report). WRRRC, LGBTQIA Resource Center, Ombuds office, or a Responsible Employee may also be contacted depending on the desire for confidentiality, need for action, and severity of issue.

Refer to the [Resources section](#) for descriptions on confidentiality, duties, and responsibilities of the various groups mentioned here. Some are required to take certain actions, others are not.

Example Conflict Resolution: Supervisor and Student

Students experiencing a conflict with an advisor or other faculty member are encouraged to discuss the problem with the academic advisor, the master advisor and/or the chair of the graduate program for advice and support before moving forward.

Step-1 If a dispute or concern arises between a graduate student and advisor with respect to differences in expectation or mentoring, the student and advisor should attempt first to resolve the issue between them. Each party should document when meeting(s) occur and briefly summarize how attempt(s) to create a mutually satisfactory resolution were approached. Advice can be provided by the Ombuds Office, which is a confidential, off-the-record resource at any step of conflict but there are more options if early advice is sought. The Ombuds office can help the student and the advisor explore options, identify resources, manage expectations, and express frustrations. Additionally, the University Ombuds offers informal mediation services provided by professionally trained and certified mediators. For issues of alleged discrimination or harassment, the student may make a direct report to any party of their choice (see [above](#)).

Step-2 If informal discussion does not resolve the problem, there are several avenues to pursue within the graduate group: in most cases, the graduate group chair or senior academic advisor should be consulted first. See chart [above](#) for direct contacts. In all cases,

local resolution should be attempted by the graduate program or home department before the matter is escalated. These efforts may be undertaken by the department chair, dissertation committee, or another faculty member.

Step-3 If resolution cannot be reached within the graduate program, advice may be sought from Graduate Studies.

The steps above should establish a baseline between the parties to follow. All established mentoring parties as described on the Resolution Map can be contacted for advice. Documentation should summarize efforts and steps to resolve the issue.

Other examples of Mentor-Mentee Conflict

- Desire to change lab/major professor
- Conflict on tool availability for student to meet the dissertation goals

Follow steps 2 and discuss avenues with the graduate group chair and senior academic advisor. If step 2 does not yield a resolution then efforts described in step 3 may be used. Graduate Studies may be consulted first depending on student preference.

Changing Major Professors

If efforts to resolve conflict have continually failed and either the PI-student relationship is untenable or the student's thesis research no longer aligns with the PI's lab, the student may be able to change their Major Professor. Steps are unique to each situation but a general guide is below. *If you would like help making this decision or thinking through these conversations, the [Ombuds Office](#) can be a resource.*

PBGG Steps to Changing Major Professors

1. Approach other faculty that could be good possible mentors. Ask them for confidentiality and discretion if desired.
2. Determine financial support needs and employment opportunities with new mentors.
3. Express to current major professor they would like a change.
4. Notify the PBGG Chair, Master Advisor, and program coordinator of their desire to change mentors.
5. Create a timeframe/timeline to complete work with current major professor.
6. Discuss any implications on research, data, authorship, space, etc. Document any agreements to share data or continue authorship together.
7. Fill out appropriate paperwork with program coordinator and/or Graduate Studies.

Confidentiality and Third Party Resources

We understand people may not feel comfortable reaching out to those in the PBGG community. Here are some other resources to consider.

Note on Confidentiality

Certain resources are [required to remain confidential](#) while others are mandated to report the claims brought to them and/or take action regarding certain claims and transgressions. If concerned, contact the group and ask what they are required to report. For example, there are clear guidelines regarding sexual harassment and mandates to report:

Non-confidential, these groups are required to report sexual harassment:

PBGG Chair, PBGG Master Advisor, PBGG Staff and Faculty, Grad Studies, HDAPP

Confidential, these groups are NOT required to report sexual harassment:

CARE, SCHS, Ombuds

More info on campus confidential resources:

<https://reporthatandbias.ucdavis.edu/confidential-resources>

Third Party Resources

Office of the Ombuds

The UC Davis Ombuds Office is a **confidential**, independent, impartial, and informal problem-solving and conflict management resource for all members of the UC Davis and UC Davis Health campus communities. The Office of the Ombuds can talk through options including making formal reports but is not a formal office and **will not report an issue without permission unless there is imminent risk of serious harm**. They hold workshops on conflict management, can provide guidance on communication strategies and advice, and can also sit-in and moderate tense conversations between mentors and mentees.

<https://ombuds.ucdavis.edu/>

Center for Advocacy, Resources & Education (CARE)

(Specifically a resource for sexual harassment or sexual violence)

CARE provides **confidential**, free, advocacy, support, and healing services to survivors of sexual harassment and all forms of sexual violence, including sexual assault, intimate partner violence, and stalking. Like the Ombuds, **they are not mandated to report issues brought to them**. CARE services are available to any UC Davis affiliate, including undergraduate students, graduate and professional students, faculty, academic appointees, and staff.

<https://care.ucdavis.edu/>

Student Health and Counseling

Student Health and Counseling are **confidential** and they can provide resources for nutrition, well-being, and counseling.

<https://shcs.ucdavis.edu/>

<https://shcs.ucdavis.edu/services/counseling-services>

Harassment and Discrimination Assistance and Prevention Program (HDAPP)

HDAPP is a **non-confidential** group that processes all reports of discrimination, harassment, sexual harassment, and/or sexual violence. This means they are mandated to take action in certain circumstances. You may report concerns directly to HDAPP, but the information is not confidential. You can report to HDAPP anonymously. This office is also responsible for upholding [Title IX](#) requirements as outlined in the UC sexual violence sexual harassment policy.

<https://hdapp.ucdavis.edu/>

<https://hdapp.sf.ucdavis.edu/resources>

<https://compliance.ucdavis.edu/title-ix>

UC Davis Women's Resources and Research Center (WRRC)

The WRRC challenges all forms of oppression, through the lens of gender equity. The WRRC provides education, advocacy, resources, and a safe space that centers the experiences of womxn, transgender, femme, and nonbinary individuals. Some WRRC individuals may be responsible employees (below) and thus are **non-confidential**.

<https://wrrc.ucdavis.edu/>

UC Davis Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Asexual Resource Center (LGBTQIA Resource Center)

The purpose of the Center is to provide an open, safe, inclusive space and community that is committed to challenging sexism, cissexism/trans oppression/transmisogyny, heterosexism, monosexism, and allosexism. Some individuals may be responsible employees (below) and thus are **non-confidential**.

<https://lgbtqia.ucdavis.edu/>

Office of Student Support and Judicial Affairs

The Office of Student Support and Judicial Affairs (OSSJA) supports the University's educational mission by upholding standards of academic honesty and responsible behavior, promoting student development, and assisting students in need. Some individuals may be responsible employees (below) and thus are **non-confidential**.

<https://ossja.ucdavis.edu/mission-functions>

GradPathways is funded by the \$90 AC fee that is included in all graduate student tuition fees.

They provide resources and hold workshops and seminars in many topics that may help students in conflict. The filtering option on their calendar page may help see what they offer.

<https://gradpathways.ucdavis.edu/>

Graduate Studies

Grad Studies is the governing body of all of the graduate programs on campus. Deans and Grad Studies staff serve as central resources for the graduate education community, collaborating with students, postdoctoral scholars, faculty and staff on a range of different topics including admissions, professional development, fellowship support, graduation requirements, graduate education policy, and more.

For example, retaliation is a violation of the faculty code of conduct and, possibly other policies, and laws. Contact the [Associate Dean for Graduate Students](#). For whistleblower retaliation reports, contact the [Campus Compliance Officer](#).

<https://grad.ucdavis.edu/>

<https://grad.ucdavis.edu/resources/help-and-support>

Responsible Employees (REs):

REs are individuals who are required to report concerns of sexual harassment/sexual violence and/or discrimination/harassment to HDAPP, regardless of your preferences after sharing information with them. Whether a UC Davis employee is an RE depends on the type of discrimination they become aware of:

For student concerns of sexual harassment and sexual violence, RE's are:

- ALL UC Employees
 - Includes student employees!

For staff and faculty concerns of sexual harassment, sexual violence, harassment or discrimination, RE's are:

- Human resources administrators, academic personnel, and Title IX professionals
- Managers and supervisors including Deans, department chairs, and directors of organized research units
- Faculty members